

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ESTATE TAX

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, each and every day it gets harder and harder to listen to my Republican friends who race to the Senate floor breathlessly telling the American people how concerned they are about the \$13 trillion national debt and how we have got to get our financial house in order. They are just very, very upset about that.

But, as you know, under the leadership of President George W. Bush, these same Republicans turned a record-breaking Federal surplus left by the Clinton administration into record-breaking deficits.

Back then, their rallying cry was "deficits don't matter," articulated by then-Vice President Dick Cheney. This "deficits don't matter" philosophy gave us two wars that were not paid for. There are estimates that the war in Iraq alone will end up costing some \$3 trillion, unpaid for. They gave us some \$700 billion in tax breaks that went to the wealthiest 1 percent. They gave us a \$400 billion unpaid for prescription drug program written by the insurance and drug companies. They gave us a \$700 billion bailout of Wall Street.

But under President Obama, Republicans have seemingly taken a 180-degree turn. Apparently, deficits do matter. Now they say we can't afford to extend unemployment insurance to 2 million Americans who lost their jobs during the worst recession in modern history, and they say we just don't have the money to create millions of new jobs by investing in rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure and transforming our energy system. We just don't have the money to do that.

The Republican hypocrisy is now about to advance to a whole new level. In the name of fiscal responsibility, they are opposing virtually every effort to help the middle-class and working families. We just can't afford to do it. But when it comes to the needs of millionaire and billionaire families, our Republican friends have no problem reducing revenue by hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars. In other words, they are deficit hawks when it comes to the needs of ordinary people, but they are very big spenders when it comes to the needs of the rich.

Four years ago, every Republican but two voted to completely eliminate the estate tax, a tax that has been in existence since 1916, and impacts only the very wealthiest families, the top three-tenths of 1 percent. Under the estate tax, 99.7 percent of American families do not pay one nickel. This huge tax break for the wealthy, repealing the estate tax, which Republicans are fight-

ing to do, would increase the national debt by more than \$1 trillion over a 10-year period. These deficit hawks, who are so concerned about the national debt and record-breaking deficits, want to increase the national debt by over \$1 trillion in a 10-year period.

Let me tell my colleagues who the major beneficiaries of this tax break would be. Would it be the average middle-class worker who during the Bush years saw a \$2,200 decline in his income? We have a collapsing middle class, working people desperately in need. Would Republican repeal of the estate tax help those workers? Not a chance. Nobody in the middle class would get one nickel of a tax break.

Would Republican repeal of the estate tax help a single mother struggling to send her daughter to college, maybe for the first time ever in that family's history? College costs are going up. Working people can't afford college. Would it help that single mom? No, I am afraid not. That single mom would not get one penny.

Would it help one of the millions of senior citizens struggling to maintain their dignity on Social Security benefits? This year there is no COLA for senior citizens. I tried to get some help there. Republicans voted against it. Couldn't do it. Would it help senior citizens struggling with the high cost of medicine? No. Those senior citizens would not get one penny of help by Republican repeal of the estate tax.

I must be honest. Sadly, there are also a few Democrats who are supporting this giveaway, all Republicans and a few Democrats.

Who are the major beneficiaries of the repeal of the estate tax or, as Republican pollsters like to call it, "the death tax"? If we completely eliminated the estate tax, it would provide an estimated \$32 billion tax break for the Walton family, the founders of Walmart. We have a family whose fortune today is worth an estimated \$86.8 billion. If, as the Republicans want, we eliminate the estate tax completely, this family—obviously of desperate need, obviously struggling hard to keep their family above water economically, struggling hard to stay off welfare—would receive an estimated \$32.7 billion in tax breaks, if the estate tax is completely eliminated.

Let's be clear. This policy being pursued by Republicans is designed to help the very richest people in our society.

Interestingly enough, our Republican friends today in all likelihood are going to vote against providing a \$35 billion emergency extension of unemployment benefits that will help 2 million Americans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. We can't afford to do it. We just don't have the money. But apparently we do have the money to provide almost \$33 billion to a family worth \$86 billion, one of the richest families in the world.

It is not only the Walton family our Republican friends and a few Democrats want to help. Permanently re-

pealing the estate tax will also provide an \$11 billion tax break to the Mars candy bar family. We all eat Mars candy bars. They are going to get an \$11 billion tax break.

It would provide a \$9 billion tax break to the Cox Cable family and a \$2.5 billion tax break to the family who founded Campbell Soup. No one in the bottom 99.7 percent of the population, nobody in the working class, nobody in the middle class, no low-income person, nobody even in the upper middle class will gain one cent of benefit from these tax breaks.

Today, while Republicans may not have the votes to permanently eliminate the estate tax, they are working feverishly to push legislation to substantially lower that tax. In fact, they have already succeeded in eliminating the estate tax this year, and this year alone, as result of President Bush's \$1.35 trillion 2001 tax cut legislation. Wiping out this tax in 2010, when billionaires are dying, for the first time in 95 years their families will not pay one cent in taxes. That has already cost our Treasury, in the midst of a \$13 trillion national debt, billions and billions of dollars in needed revenue.

It seems to me that at a time when this country has a \$13 trillion national debt, at a time when 22 percent of our children are living in poverty—the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world—at a time when our infrastructure is crumbling, at a time when we have a desperate need to transform our energy system and by doing that we can put millions of people to work rebuilding America, transportation infrastructure, energy, it is beyond comprehension, literally beyond comprehension that anyone can come down to the floor of this Senate and argue with a straight face that we should provide hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires.

I should add all of this takes place within the context of the United States already having by far the most unequal distribution of wealth of any major country on Earth. The top 1 percent own more wealth than the bottom 90 percent. When we give away billions more in tax breaks to the very rich, we are only exacerbating that. We are making that wealth gap even greater.

That is why I have introduced the Responsible Estate Tax Act, S. 3533, along with Senators HARKIN, WHITEHOUSE, SHERROD BROWN, and Senator FRANKEN. This legislation would raise \$318 billion over the next decade by establishing a graduated inheritance tax on estates of over \$3.5 million. I actually cannot take credit for this legislation. I would like to, but I cannot. It would be dishonest. This is an idea developed 100 years ago by a good Republican President named Teddy Roosevelt.

In 1910 he pushed this idea which eventually became adopted in 1916. This is what Teddy Roosevelt, as this chart indicates, said 100 years ago. I

think my Republican friends probably will not be quoting Teddy Roosevelt, though he is one of our great Presidents. This is what Teddy Roosevelt said:

The absence of effective State, and, especially, national, restraint upon unfair money-getting has tended to create a small class of enormously wealthy and economically powerful men, whose chief object is to hold and increase their power.

That sounds pretty familiar. A small group of incredibly wealthy people whose sole objective is to hold and increase their power.

Therefore, I, [Teddy Roosevelt] believe in . . . a graduated inheritance tax on big fortunes, properly safeguarded against evasion, and increasing rapidly in amount with the size of the estate.

What he was talking about was not from a financial point of view of bringing in revenue. He was expressing fear about America becoming an oligarchic aristocracy in which a few people had incredible wealth and used that wealth to perpetuate their position in society. If that is not what is happening today, then I don't know what is happening.

When we look at Wall Street spending \$300 million trying to stop any real reform of Wall Street at a time when these guys are making all kinds of money, having been bailed out by taxpayers, if we look at the oil companies and all of their lobbyists around here, that is precisely what is going on. A small number of incredibly wealthy people are perpetuating their power through their wealth.

In order to gain support for the permanent repeal of the estate tax or a major reduction in estate tax rates, Republicans and lobbyists representing the super rich are doing what they do best, and that is distorting reality. We will not hear any of my Republican friends who talk about repealing the estate tax tell us that the richest families in America are going to be receiving \$10, \$20, \$30 billion in tax breaks. What they have done, both as politicians and through their lobbyists, has created a mythology that a responsible and a fair estate tax—or as their pollsters have framed it, “a death tax”—will somehow destroy family farms and small businesses.

In other words, what they are doing is what they very often do. They say: It is not the very rich, the billionaires we are interested in protecting. It is not the Walmart people. We are interested in family farmers and small businesses. Those are the people we are trying to protect. But nothing could be further from the truth.

As usual, they are using their old tactic of pretending to worry about the needs of ordinary people as a smoke-screen to serve extremely wealthy special interests.

Let's talk a little bit about what they are saying. In terms of the preservation of the family farm, something I happen to believe in passionately—we have a lot of family farms in Vermont—the American Farm Bureau

was asked some years ago to come up with a single example of one family farm being lost as a result of the estate tax. They could not find one farm, not one farm that had to be sold as a result of the estate tax, not one.

I should tell you, the legislation I have authored provides even more protections to family farms than previous law. So they are not protecting the family farmers; they are protecting the Walton family and other billionaire families.

In terms of small businesses—something that is obviously vital to our economy; small business is the engine of job creation; we have to protect small businesses—this is what the non-partisan Tax Policy Center has estimated: that only 80 small businesses and farm estates throughout the country paid an estate tax in 2009–80; 8–0—representing, as this chart shows, 0.003 percent of all estates. In other words, virtually every single small business and family farm in this country would not pay one penny in estate taxes under my bill, and because of protections in the Tax Code, their effective, real tax rate would only be 14 percent. And the relatively few people who inherit small businesses who pay an estate tax are given 14 years to pay it off. They do not have to pay it off in 1 year.

So when our Republican friends come down here and tell us they are fighting to protect the family farm or small businesses, that just is not the case. What they are coming down here to do is to protect the Walton family and the Steinbrenner family and the other billionaire families who are spending a whole lot of money in a major lobbying effort to make sure the richest people in this country become even richer.

So I think what this debate is really all about is what the old Woody Guthrie song framed and described as “which side are you on?”—which side are you on?—and the Republicans have answered very loudly and clearly, when it comes to the needs of the unemployed and the uninsured, when it comes to protecting the interests of the struggling middle class, they are just not there. When it comes to ordinary people, the Republicans are deficit hawks. But if you are a millionaire or a billionaire family and if you need a huge tax break that will cost our government hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars, you can count on Republicans for your support. That is what this issue is about.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, at 2:30 this afternoon, the Senate will vote again on unemployment insurance. This bill is about jobs. This bill is about compassion. This bill would extend unemployment insurance for people who have lost their jobs.

This bill is about jobs because unemployment insurance goes to people who spend it immediately. That would increase economic demand, and that would help support our fragile economic recovery. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says that additional unemployment benefits would have one of the largest effects on economic output and employment per dollar spent compared with any other policy. A fancy term is the “multiplier effect.” Dollars spent on unemployment benefits have a much greater effect on the economy, a bigger bang for the buck than almost any other dollar expended by the Federal Government. It stimulates the economy. Unemployment benefits stimulate the economy, and clearly it helps the people who have lost their jobs. Of the 11 policies CBO analyzed, the Congressional Budget Office ranked increasing aid to the unemployed first. It is No. 1. CBO says it will create the most jobs per dollar of budgetary cost.

As I mentioned, this vote is really about compassion. As of this week, more than 2.5 million out-of-work Americans have stopped receiving unemployment insurance benefits because Congress has failed to enact this bill. That is more than 2.5 million people who are not getting a paycheck to pay the bills. That is more than 2.5 million Americans who are not getting any help from unemployment insurance to tide them over. These 2.5 million Americans are trying to get work. But there are still five people looking for work for every job opening—five looking for every job available. They need to get help until they can find that job.

A woman from Helena, MT—the town I was born in—called my office and told us that unemployment benefits are keeping her family afloat. She was laid off when she was 8 months pregnant. She wants the Senate to know she has worked since she was a teenager. She wants to work. And she will work again.

For these 2.5 million Americans, this bill is about the roof over their heads. For these 2.5 million Americans, this bill is about keeping the electricity on. For these 2.5 million Americans, this bill is about food on the table. It is that simple. It is that important.

A Montana father with three small children was laid off after 18 years of service because the company could no longer pay his wages. Now he has no income. But he continues to look for work. His home is going into foreclosure. Unemployment insurance has been his only income. It is what puts food on the table for his family.

This is America. When there is an emergency, we in America do not leave people behind. Let's not leave the unemployed behind. We have stripped this measure down to the bare essentials. We simply must pass this bill. This afternoon, I urge my colleagues to vote for cloture and move this important bill.